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ABSTRACT

This handbook is intended for parents of children who will be attending French immersion kindergarten in Alberta (Canada). A question and answer format involving a fictitious teacher, parents, and child was adopted to facilitate reading and ease of use. These hypothetical questions and answers address a variety of topics, including the parents' role, children's personal needs and expected progress, details about the French immersion kindergarten program, how to prepare children for the program, an overview of what will be learned, and the partnership among parents, the school, and the community. Two appendices are included. Appendix 1 suggests questions that parents may wish to ask when registering their child. Appendix 2 offers a table detailing the differences between the programs offered to French immersion kindergarten program children and Francophone Kindergarten program children. Other resources available to parents are also listed. (KFT)

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A Handbook For Parents

ED 438 718

French Immersion KINDERGARTEN

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French Immersion Kindergarten

KINDERGARTEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF LEARNING iii

FOREWORD v

INTRODUCTION 1

BRANDON'S QUESTIONS 3

1. What will I do in a French immersion kindergarten? 3
2. What will my classroom look like? 3
3. Will I learn new songs? 3
4. Will I be able to play? 3
5. Who will take care of me? 3
6. Who else will I meet at the school? 3

MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS' QUESTIONS 4

Our Role as Parents 4
1. How can we help Brandon at school and at home? 4
2. How can we encourage Brandon to talk about his day at the French immersion kindergarten? 7

The French Immersion Kindergarten 7
1. What is the French immersion kindergarten program? 7
2. What is the French immersion approach? 9
3. How can we prepare Brandon for French immersion? 9
4. How is the kindergarten class structured? 10
5. What will our child learn in the French immersion kindergarten? 11
6. How is children's learning assessed in the French immersion kindergarten? Why? 14

Our Child's Personal Needs and Progress 15
1. Is there a chance that Brandon will feel insecure or frustrated in the French immersion environment? 15
2. How much progress in French is expected in the first year? 15
3. If a child has special needs, how will the French immersion kindergarten program meet these needs? 15
4. How will the French immersion kindergarten program help Brandon prepare for Grade 1? 16

Partnerships 16
1. What do partnerships among parents, teachers and the community look like? 16

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RESOURCES 18

APPENDICES 19

Appendix 1 : Questions parents may wish to ask when registering their child in French immersion kindergarten 19

Appendix 2 : Differences between the kindergarten programs offered to French immersion children and Francophone children. 20

FEEDBACK 21

Message from the Minister of Learning

Kindergarten marks a new beginning for you and your child. It is a time for new discoveries and challenges; as your child makes the transition from home to school and as you meet and work with the people who are partners in your child's education.

While students are at the center of the education system, parents are a vital partner. Your involvement in your child's education is critical to his or her success. However, to help your child succeed – you need to know what he or she is learning. *French Immersion Kindergarten* provides a clear, concise description of what you can expect of your child's kindergarten program. This handbook describes how young children learn, how learning is assessed and how you can be involved. It is important to remember that each child is different and will learn and achieve at different rates in different areas.

I believe that education is a fundamental part of the Alberta Advantage, and my goal is for Alberta to have the best-educated students in the world. We can accomplish this only one way – by working *together*. We are all partners in education – parents, teachers, administrators – and we must work to address issues and help ensure Alberta students acquire the skills and knowledge they need for a successful future.

Our children are our future, and our most important investment.

Dr. Lyle Oberg
M.L.A. Strathmore-Brooks
Minister of Learning

FOREWORD

Who is it for?

As indicated by the title, this handbook is intended for parents whose child is or will be attending a French immersion kindergarten in Alberta.

What will you find in this handbook?

A question and answer format was adopted to facilitate reading. In the introduction, a fictitious teacher, Mrs. Dubé, writes to Brandon and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, before kindergarten begins. The Roberts reply asking questions about the French immersion kindergarten. Mrs. Dubé responds to these questions.

These questions and answers address a variety of topics:

- The parents' role (p. 4-7)
- Children's personal needs and progress (p. 15-16)
- The French immersion kindergarten program (p. 7-14)
- The partnership among the parents, the school and the community (p. 16)

How to use this handbook

- Parents looking for general information should consult the following sections:

  Brandon's questions (p. 3)
  Our role as parents (p. 4-7)
  What is the French immersion kindergarten program? (p. 7)
  What is the French immersion approach? (p. 9)
  How can we prepare our child for French immersion? (p. 9)
  How is the kindergarten class structured? (p. 10)
  What will our child learn in the French immersion kindergarten? (p. 11-14)

  Parents are encouraged to seek further information by consulting the kindergarten teacher.

- "Expert" parents, those who have had a child attend a French immersion kindergarten in previous years, will probably want to get a quick overview of the handbook in order to refresh their memory and review new information.

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When to use this handbook

This handbook can be used as a handy reference tool or as a basis for dialogue with school personnel and other parents. At the time of registration, prior to entry in the French immersion kindergarten program, it can provide parents with an overview of the program. Throughout the school year, it can be used to answer questions as they come up.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Brandon,
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Roberts,

I was happy to learn that you are in my kindergarten class, Brandon. Welcome! And welcome to you, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, to the exciting experience of French immersion kindergarten. French immersion might seem a little frightening at first for all of you, but I am here to guide you along and make the transition as smooth as possible.

If you have any particular questions or issues that you want me to address, do not hesitate to let me know. Your involvement will help make Brandon's experience with school and French immersion a positive one.

Together, we will make a great team for Brandon's education.

"À bientôt", Brandon! See you soon.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Dubé,
French immersion kindergarten teacher

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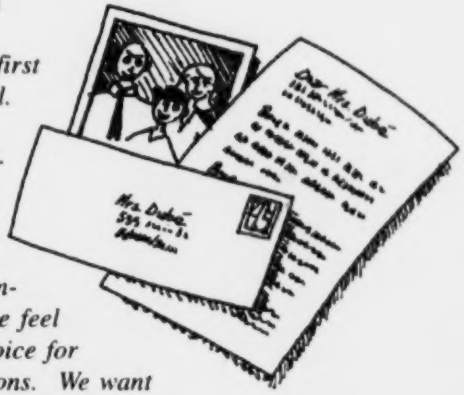
Dear Mrs. Dubé,

We were very happy to receive your letter. Brandon can't wait to come to your kindergarten class. He is excited about starting kindergarten and learning a new language, but he asks so many questions. Every week, he places a marker on the calendar so he can see how soon kindergarten will start. He has drawn a picture of you, his very first teacher, on the first day of school.



We too are excited and apprehensive... First of all, we know very little French. Also, this is our first experience with school and with French immersion since Brandon is our first born. Although we feel French immersion is the right choice for our son, we do have many questions. We want to make sure that Brandon gets off to an excellent start in his first year of school.

We have attached our list of questions, along with Brandon's, and we look forward to reading your answers.

"À bientôt!"

Sincerely yours,

The Roberts

BRANDON'S QUESTIONS

1. What will I do in a French immersion kindergarten?

You will learn a new language, French, while playing with many new friends. You will learn all about people, animals, trees, flowers, houses, castles and much more. To help you understand French, I will show you pictures, make drawings and use gestures. In no time, you will know your very first French words! In my class there will also be times for snacks, playing outside when it is nice and relaxing while listening to soft music.

2. What will my classroom look like?

Your classroom will be arranged so you can play in many different learning centres. You may decide to draw pictures, paint with your fingers or look at colourful images in a book. In the water and sand centre, you will be able to create sand castles or play with floating objects. You may also want to assemble puzzles or discover books on topics you love such as dinosaurs. Maybe you'll want to "write" or draw secret messages for your new friends.

3. Will I learn new songs?

Yes! You will learn many French songs in my class. Maybe you'll want to sing them to your parents when you get back home from kindergarten.

4. Will I be able to play?

Yes, because playing is the best way for you to learn. You will have plenty of time to play in the classroom's different learning centres. You will also have lots of fun playing in the gymnasium or outside on the playground.

5. Who will take care of me?

As your teacher, I will always take care of you in school. I can't wait to meet you again! On the first day of kindergarten, I will help you get to know your classroom, your school and your new friends. During the year, I will help you organize yourself and settle into your new environment. I'll be there to listen and talk with you.

6. Who else will I meet at the school?

Many other people at the school will also help you out: the principal, the librarian, other teachers and other students' parents. I am sure you will learn many new things from all these new persons.

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MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS' QUESTIONS

Our Role as Parents

1. How can we help Brandon at school and at home?

As parents, your role in Brandon's life is central. You are responsible for meeting his physical, social and emotional needs. You are his first teachers, and family influences are lifelong.

At school

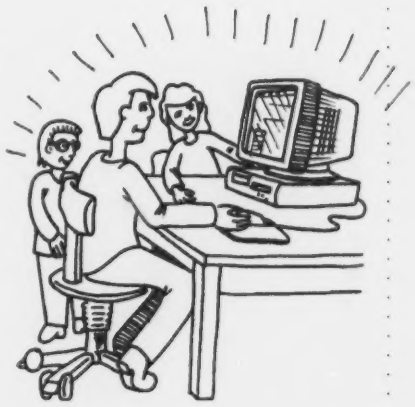
Each teacher invites parents to get involved in various ways, as appropriate for the individual parents, the community, and the interests and needs of the class. Even if you don't speak or understand French, your presence is very precious to your child, and to me, his teacher. You can participate in classroom or outside activities. Some French immersion kindergarten programs have scheduled helper days, while others encourage more informal, drop-in visits.

Here are typical tasks carried out by parents in the French immersion kindergarten classroom:

- Assisting at a learning centre
- Helping with snacks
- Listening, with the children, to the reading of a book
- Learning new French vocabulary with the children
- Supervising simple games
- Obtaining, preparing or cleaning materials
- Sharing personal expertise with the children
- Organizing and supervising the classroom library
- Assisting with computer activities
- Listening as children read
- Mixing paints and cutting paper for art projects
- Helping children with their clothing
- Assisting with field trips
- Providing clerical assistance (typing, filing, sorting, and photocopying)
- Preparing bulletin board displays
- Preparing charts, posters, and booklets.

At home

Things you can do at home to help Brandon develop his English language abilities:



- Read stories aloud at bedtime.
- Sing songs and rhymes with your child, putting the emphasis on similarities and differences of sounds.
- Help Brandon print his name.
- Be a reader and a writer. Provide a role model.
- Use good speech. Be a model of language skills.
- Celebrate and encourage Brandon's attempts to communicate through writing and reading.
- Listen to Brandon and encourage him to talk about everyday activities.
- Encourage Brandon to count and make sets with the numbers 1 to 20.

Things you can do at home to promote French language acquisition:

- Include some French in your everyday home life, for example, watching a French program on television, a video, attending a cultural event in French or listening to a tape of French songs. (You'll learn some French too, and the whole family will have fun!)
- Review the French vocabulary of the week or month with Brandon.
- Listen to, repeat, recite, sing along with Brandon as he shares his latest French songs, rhymes or stories.

Things you can do at home to encourage Brandon to be more self-sufficient:

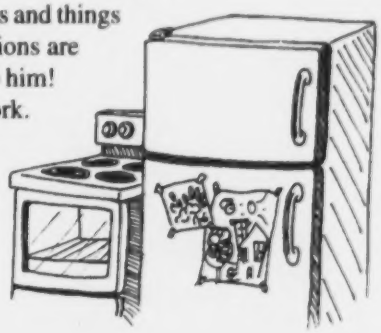
- Encourage Brandon to make decisions (offer choices), to take responsibility for some tasks and solve everyday problems.
- Provide opportunities to practice buttoning, doing zippers, nose blowing, hand washing, drawing, cutting and shoelace tying.

Things you can do at home to promote Brandon's good health:

- Provide plenty of rest, with early bedtimes.
- Include a variety of nutritious foods from all the food groups on the menu.
- Encourage Brandon to walk, stretch, hop, jump, run, dance or skip, both indoors and outdoors.

Things you can do at home to promote Brandon's artistic growth and creativity:

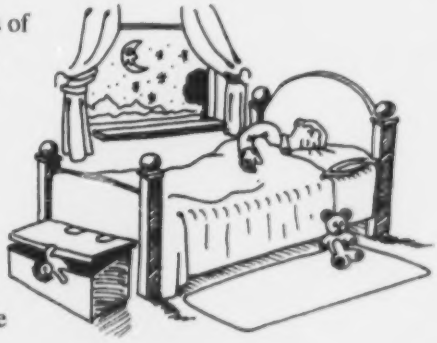
- Invite Brandon to solve simple problems and find new solutions.
- Be positive and encouraging when he is drawing, painting, dancing, playing music and role playing. Ask questions about what he is doing.
- Post his artwork (at his eye level) in a special place in your house; he will get the message that you value his artwork.
- Avoid giving him models of objects and things to copy or imitate. His own creations are much more real and meaningful to him! Value the authenticity of his artwork.



- Expose him to the works of many artists: visit an art gallery, attend a music recital or a dance performance.
- Reserve an art area in your home for drawing, painting, or sculpture making. Basic materials such as coloured crayons, paper, accessories for role playing and homemade musical instruments will be enough to trigger Brandon's creative mind!
- Invite Brandon to observe colours, shapes, textures, sounds and smells in his environment.

Include Brandon in everyday activities:

- Baking – Have Brandon help measure ingredients.
- Walking – Encourage Brandon to observe his environment and develop an active lifestyle.
- Shopping – Point out the names of stores, gas stations, businesses, restaurants and schools; notice traffic signs.



- Gardening – Give Brandon a small section to plant and care for.
- Writing – Include a note from Brandon in your letters to family members; have him write telephone messages and lists.
- Cleaning and tidying up – Help Brandon sort toys into categories: cars, blocks, dishes and puzzles.

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Brandon will need lots of practice and patient encouragement in his learning. Working together is just as important as completing the task.

And... don't forget about your own culture.

- Share your childhood experiences with Brandon.
- Read him fairy tales, nursery rhymes, poems and stories.
- Ensure that he is exposed to your own traditions, folklore and stories.

2. How can we encourage Brandon to talk about his day at the French immersion kindergarten?

Each new experience adds to Brandon's knowledge, and when he shares this experience with an adult, there is great potential for reinforcing learning. As parents, you are in the best position to help him make connections between past experiences and current ones.

Still, talking with Brandon about his experiences in a French immersion kindergarten sounds easier than it is! The question, "What did you learn in school today?" often receives the response, "Nothing. All we did was play!"

These are some alternative questions that might help Brandon share more specific information with you:

What new French word did you learn today?
How did you make that?
What are you learning about now?
What learning centres did you go to today?
What was in the sand table today?
Can you tell me about the story you heard today?
Where did you play today?
Who did you play with today?

The French Immersion Kindergarten

1. What is the French immersion kindergarten program?

In Alberta, as in most provinces, kindergarten is optional, but a large percentage of families choose to enrol their young children in this program. Kindergarten is a place where all children can learn. It is characterized by an emphasis on the balanced development of children's multiple dimensions such as the cultural, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual.

The early French immersion program either starts in kindergarten or in Grade 1. Also called total immersion, this program utilizes French for

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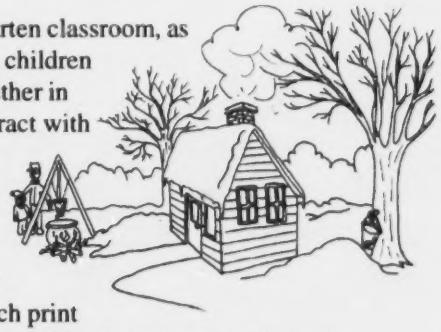
the majority of class time (100% of class time in French is the goal). The French immersion kindergarten program, as any other kindergarten program, is centered on the whole child. It takes into account the child's particular needs and strengths, learning style and interests. The language component of the immersion program presents a different filter through which a child's learning takes place.

Every year in Alberta, many parents like you choose the French immersion program for their children.

The French immersion kindergarten classroom

People walking down a school hallway can easily recognize the French immersion kindergarten area. It's bright, cheerful, colourful and busy, with lots of printed words in French on the walls. *"Bonjour"*, is often written on the classroom door.



In the French immersion kindergarten classroom, as in a regular kindergarten program, children are busy playing and learning together in varied activity centres. They interact with each other while exploring ideas and the world around them. On closer observation of the French immersion environment, you notice certain unique features: for example, walls covered with French print materials, shelves displaying assorted French-language books and a variety of language activities supported by visuals and mime.

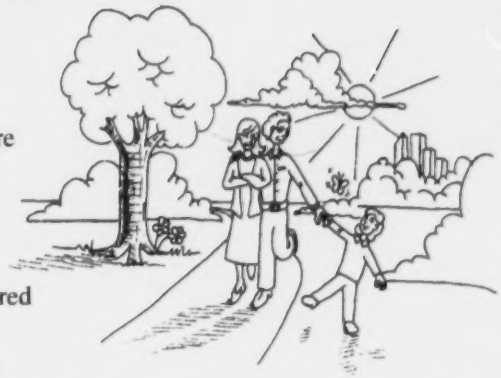
Although Brandon is enrolled in a French immersion kindergarten, his needs are similar to those of children in regular kindergarten programs, with the exception of aspects pertaining to learning French in an immersion setting. In order to address these specific needs, the linguistic and cultural aspects of French in the French immersion kindergarten are interwoven into daily activities. At the same time, activities respect each student's characteristics, developmental needs and culture.

The goals of the French immersion kindergarten program

French is one of the two official languages of Canada. In Alberta, where English is dominant, French is a minority language. The French immersion kindergarten offers an opportunity for non-Francophone students to be introduced to French in an educational setting. The French immersion kindergarten program strives to give parents the support they need to accompany their child in this worthwhile endeavour.

The long-term goals of the French immersion program, at all grade levels, are:

1. full mastery of the English language
2. functional fluency in French
3. understanding and appreciation of the French culture



The French immersion kindergarten is the first step of Brandon's journey in acquiring another language and gaining an appreciation of its culture. It emphasizes listening skills in order to prepare him for more structured learning in the elementary grades.

2. *What is the French immersion approach?*

The French immersion approach is based on the premise young children learn a second language best when a "gentle approach" is used. They learn French in somewhat the same way they acquired their first language at home.

In the French immersion kindergarten, Brandon will be exposed to rich and varied language activities. This input will help him develop the fundamentals of language that are the building blocks for listening, reading, speaking and writing in French. In later years, as Brandon becomes increasingly bilingual, he will learn to think in French. He will begin this process by building two distinctive labels for one concept. French immersion kindergarten teachers consider the interplay between the children's first language and the target language by capitalizing on the knowledge they already have and choosing appropriate second language learning strategies.

3. *How can we prepare our child for French immersion?*

The French immersion program is designed for non-French-speaking children. These children and their parents are not expected to have any knowledge of French. Alberta Education's 1996 publication, *Yes, You Can Help! – A Guide for French Immersion Parents*, states: "The best advice we can give when enrolling your child in an early French immersion program is to prepare him for school just as you would if he were entering the English stream, from ensuring that he can manage his own jacket and shoes to making him comfortable spending time away from you. Anything you can do to familiarize him with the school, the playground, the teacher (if possible during the spring), future classmates (if you don't know any of the other parents, you should meet them at the spring information/orientation meeting), the route to and from school, and the routine he'll follow in the fall will make the transition that much smoother. Most, if not all, of the children in his class will have no prior knowledge of French, so don't feel it's necessary to put

him in a French pre-school or daycare. On the other hand, it's a good idea to expose him to a little French beforehand so that he can enjoy some familiarity with the sound of the language: a French cartoon on the TV, a segment of *Sesame Street*, a bit of French music on a children's tape or compact disc" (p. 46).

4. How is the kindergarten class structured?

Your child learns best through direct, sensory experience. You may have noticed that Brandon needs to manipulate, explore and experiment with real objects. He learns best by doing, moving and talking.

Play is a valuable and important way for children to learn about themselves and the world around them. It provides them with the opportunity to experiment with new skills that they will use in later grades. That is why most kindergarten programs feature a variety of spaces and work-play stations for independent and small or large-group activities.

Learning centres give children the opportunity to explore and discover, and take responsibility for selecting and completing a variety of activities. Some learning centres may be available all year. Others are introduced for special projects, interests or at seasonal times. Following are examples of learning centres you may find in a French immersion kindergarten:

- Art centre – Painting and drawing materials for children to explore and express their feelings; books or reproductions of artists' work for children to look at and discuss.
  This centre contributes to your child's spatial intelligence.
- Construction centre – Blocks, manipulative toys and woodworking tools for children to design, create and build.
  This centre contributes to your child's spatial intelligence and logical-mathematical intelligence.
- Dramatic play centre – Props for a house or store, puppets and dress-up clothes for imaginative play.
  This centre contributes to your child's linguistic intelligence and interpersonal intelligence.
- Language centre – A reading, listening and writing area with a variety of books and tapes in French, and paper, pencils, markers, crayons and possibly a computer to help children express thoughts and ideas.
  This centre contributes to your child's linguistic intelligence.

Workspaces, activities and materials are organized in response to children's diverse needs, interests and activities, while taking into account the expectations of the kindergarten program.

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5. *What will our child learn in the French immersion kindergarten?*

The French immersion kindergarten program describes clear expectations in seven learning areas. These expectations are equivalent to those found in the regular kindergarten program:

- Personal and social responsibility
- French language arts
- Appreciation for learning French
- Community and environmental awareness
- Physical skills and well-being
- Artistic expression and appreciation
- Mathematics

These seven learning areas address all growth dimensions of each child as well as what children will need to know and be able to do to facilitate transition from kindergarten to Grade 1.

Learning in kindergarten is **integrated and holistic**. The expectations, which are clearly defined in the French immersion kindergarten program, include a list of general and specific outcomes. Children's personal pace of learning, their growth and specific needs are always considered in the planning of a learning environment.

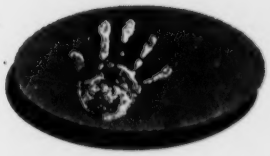
Following is a summary of the outcomes of the seven learning areas:

Personal and social responsibility

It takes time to develop self-awareness and social skills. This development occurs at different rates as a result of each child's differing experiences. In the French immersion kindergarten program, your child will begin to develop and practice skills that he or she will continue to improve throughout life.

Brandon will start learning how to think in a critical manner, and continue to ask questions about things and events around him. He will also have many opportunities to use creative thinking in everyday activities and classroom projects. Gradually, he will become more and more responsible and self-sufficient.

By participating actively in learning tasks, trying new things and taking risks, Brandon will begin to see himself as capable of learning. Children of this age are curious, and they are learning to adapt to new situations. They begin to accept rules and deal with routines in a school environment. They gradually learn to take responsibility for selecting and completing learning activities.



Brandon needs to learn to express his feelings in socially acceptable ways and to show respect for others. He will do so by working cooperatively, giving and receiving help, and taking part in small and large-group activities. Kindergarten will help Brandon learn how to work and play with others. Most children entering kindergarten are not used to being in a room with many other children of the same age and sharing the attention of only one or two adults. This requires the development of many social skills. In kindergarten, Brandon will learn much about friendship, cooperation and appropriate behaviour in different social situations.

French language arts

In the daily routines and experiences in the French immersion kindergarten, Brandon will gradually build on his comprehension of French oral communication, and of **reading and writing French**[1] in order to meet his need to obtain information, tell stories and relate experiences.

Listening skills will be emphasized throughout all activities in order to stimulate language acquisition. As Brandon progresses and his knowledge of French expands, he will be introduced to more vocabulary and language structures. This is done while talking about everyday events and the world he lives in.

The rhythm and melody of the French songs Brandon will sing with his friends will make language acquisition a pleasure. He will be invited to imitate and repeat words and sentences through word games and play situations. He will also learn to integrate new vocabulary in his everyday communication. Mimes and gestures, voice pitch, context and illustrations will all contribute greatly to Brandon's understanding. He will eventually be able to initiate a conversation in French.

Brandon will enjoy and share many different types of books, stories, poems, recordings and videos. He will express his ideas, experiences and imaginary world through talking, pictures, letters or words. He will learn to use illustrations to give him information about the books he is **reading**[2]. He will start to understand that letters and words have a specific meaning. He will begin to recognize, copy and write familiar words and letters. All of these aspects of language will be developed in French.

1. **Reading and writing French** : Although the emphasis in kindergarten is not placed on the systematic learning of reading and writing, even before entering kindergarten, your child has already started to read and write. Having him react to a book you are reading together or by letting him scribble lines and shapes in a letter you are sending to his grandparents, are ways in which you can support this process.
2. **Reading** : Children, as they turn the pages of a book and follow the words with a finger as they are being read to, have already started to read. These are important steps of the reading proces

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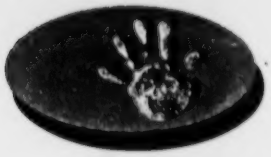

The knowledge, skills and attitudes developed in French will have a positive effect on Brandon's ability to use his first language for communicating, personal satisfaction and learning.

Appreciation for learning French

As he is exposed to the French language and its culture, Brandon will learn to appreciate the value of learning this language. He will be invited to "live" in French and discover the Francophone community by visiting or meeting with Francophones. He will also be exposed to the French immersion community in class, within the school or outside. Brandon will become aware of the diversity and richness of differences among languages and cultures.

Brandon will also be invited to share his family traditions and celebrations. This will enhance his pride in his own culture. He will become aware that people of different cultures celebrate occasions in their own special ways.

Physical skills and well-being

Brandon will learn about healthy food choices, how to observe safety rules and participate in physical activities. He will learn to practice behaviours that promote a healthy lifestyle.

Through games and activities (using equipment such as balls, bean bags and hoops), Brandon will develop coordinated movement, balance and stability. His fine motor skills will also improve. He will learn to hold a writing implement and control its movements. Eye-hand coordination will increase as Brandon works with small materials such as buttons, cubes, blocks, beads, paint brushes and crayons.

Community and environmental awareness

Brandon will use his senses to explore, investigate and describe aspects of his environment. He will become more aware of problems in his community (pollution, poverty and other situations). These will be carefully selected and developmentally appropriate for kindergarten children. He will also earn to recognize and appreciate similarities and differences in living things, objects and materials.

Using simple tools safely and appropriately, Brandon will select and work with a variety of materials to build structures, and explore scientific concepts by working with sand, water, blocks and other materials.

Brandon will become aware of similarities and differences between himself and others. The French immersion environment will help to make him aware of the richness of differences among languages and

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cultures. He will learn to describe feelings, special interests, as well as events and experiences he shares with family and friends. He will learn about special places, and about people who help in the community. Brandon will continue to learn about animals and their habitats, climates, means of transportation and time-related activities, always in meaningful and authentic situations.

Artistic expression and appreciation

To help him develop aesthetically, Brandon will be invited to create and respond to art. He will explore the language, techniques and materials of different artistic media. He will readily engage in making paintings, drawings, sculptures and other visual art forms. He will also take part in dancing, drama, music and poetry. He will create his own artistic works and listen or look at the musical or artistic creations of others.

Mathematics

Brandon will learn about patterns and numbers by sorting, matching and counting familiar materials, and by putting them in order in authentic and meaningful contexts. In daily activities, he will learn to measure length, capacity and weight, and develop an awareness of temperature, time, shape and space.

Brandon will begin to use mathematical processes such as problem-solving, reasoning and visualization that he will continue to expand and refine throughout his schooling.

6. How is children's learning assessed in the French immersion kindergarten? Why?

Assessment is a natural, ongoing and important part of daily learning. We can gain information about a child's skill levels and understanding by questioning and talking to the child, listening to the language he or she uses and observing his or her behaviour.

Information gathered about Brandon will be used in several ways:

- to structure the learning environment and match learning activities to his learning needs
- to give him ongoing feedback and help him recognize what he knows and is able to do
- to help him focus his efforts on more challenging activities

As parents, you will receive information about your child's progress and achievements through oral or written reports, parent evenings,

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classroom visits and parent-teacher conferences. These activities and events are also intended as opportunities for you to give information to the teacher.

Our Child's Personal Needs and Progress

1. Is there a chance that Brandon will feel insecure or frustrated in the French immersion environment?

Current research is reassuring. In *So You Want Your Child to Learn French*, Weber and Tardif report: "During the first days of school, we carefully observed both the regular and immersion students with some of parents' most often voiced concerns in mind. However, contrary to our expectations, the second-language element did not really seem to be a major source of frustration or difficulty for the children. The video recordings and interviews clearly show that the children were able to construct much meaning from the immersion situation even at the beginning of the year... Many of the children, for example, offered the following explanations of how they came to understand the teacher's French: 'I just listen very hard and my brain figures it out'; 'I think of a word in English it sounds like'; and 'I ask the teacher'." (pp. 55-60)

2. How much progress in French is expected in the first year?

Alberta Learning's guide for French immersion parents, *Yes, You Can Help!* states, "As a general rule of thumb, children who participate in an immersion kindergarten (half days) will have gradually switched from English sentences with French words and phrases thrown in to French sentences interspersed with some English by Christmas of Grade 1". (p. 29)

It is important to remain positive and encouraging even though your child has not yet demonstrated any visible learning.

3. If a child has special needs, how will the French immersion kindergarten program meet these needs?

The French immersion kindergarten program is based on the belief that all children can learn. In the kindergarten room, children with a variety of needs and skill levels work and learn together. All children are included in activities that help them build on their own levels of learning.

Pertaining to children's special needs and the French immersion environment, Alberta Learning's guide for French immersion parents (*Yes, You Can Help!*) notes that "...immersion students with a variety of difficulties – from learning disabilities to low intelligence to behavioural

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problems – will do as well academically as they could be expected to do in an English program, provided they receive the same assistance as they would if enrolled in the English stream. Studies also indicate that immersion is not likely to be the cause of learning difficulties; the same problems would arise in any educational setting. Any student who can learn to communicate in his first language can acquire a second language through the immersion process" (p. 35).

Schools can usually help you get information about available community services to assist in meeting the needs of your child: health, social and family support agencies; recreational and cultural associations; and a wide variety of other groups. Coordination of services supports the integrated learning needs of children.

4. How will the French immersion kindergarten program help Brandon prepare for Grade 1?

The French immersion kindergarten will enhance Brandon's self-confidence and give him a growing sense of responsibility. The program will teach him how to try new things with confidence and encourage, creativity and a "can do" attitude. Physically, your child's endurance and stamina will build gradually over the year.

Parents across Alberta have noticed how kindergarten gives their children a strong disposition for learning in a school environment. Children become familiar with the expectations of teachers, and are motivated and focused to take on new challenges. You will probably notice these same characteristics in Brandon.

Partnerships

1. What do partnerships among parents, teachers and the community look like?

When children begin French immersion kindergarten, parents and teachers enter into a partnership to support the children's learning. As parents, you are encouraged to become involved. Different teachers and schools offer different partnership formats. For ideas on this topic, please refer to : "Our Role as Parents" (p. 4-7).

Communication between school and family in this first year is very important to children and their parents. It is common practice for kindergarten teachers to use newsletters, notes and telephone calls to share information with parents. In turn, you are encouraged to become involved and share your concerns.

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Many French immersion kindergarten programs have resources for parents on a variety of topics such as child development, multiple literacies, the French immersion approach, discipline, parenting, health issues and community programs. This information is also available in libraries or through local agencies or government offices.

RESOURCES

The following two resources, published by the Language Services Branch of Alberta Learning, are available for review at your school. You can also purchase them from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre (see inside cover):

French Language Arts: What every parent should know (1989)

Yes, You Can Help! A Guide for French Immersion Parents (1996)

Weber, S., Tardif, C. The Young Child's View of Starting French Immersion, in *So You Want Your Child to Learn French!* Canadian Parents for French, 1990.

For more information, contact:

Language Services Branch
Alberta Learning
Devonian Building, 9th Floor
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 0L2

Tel.: (780) 427-2940
Fax: (780) 422-1947
Web site: http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/french/
E-mail: LSB@gov.ab.ca

Canadian Parents for French
Alberta Branch
Box 30036, Chinook Postal Outlet
6455 Macleod Trail
Calgary, Alberta T2H 2V8

Tel.: (403) 262-5187 (in the Calgary region)
1-800-561-2978
Fax: (403) 265-0194
Web site: http://www.cpfalta.ab.ca
E-mail: cpfalta@cadvision.com

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questions parents may wish to ask when registering their child in French immersion kindergarten

School staff will provide information about hours of operation, school telephone numbers, vacation dates, emergency procedures, field trips and transportation. They will also explain the French immersion kindergarten program and daily routines. However, they may not answer these questions unless you ask:

Does the program operate for the full year?

Will there be extra costs for special activities or field trips?

How many children will be in the classroom?

Does the French immersion kindergarten class mix with children in other grades? Are those children also part of a French immersion program?

What are the rules for the classroom, school and playground?

How do you handle discipline in the classroom and playground?

How do you resolve conflicts between children?

How can parents be involved? Is there a French immersion parent group?

What is the role of the school council?

What are the orientation and start-up procedures?

What reporting method is used?

When are report cards and conferences scheduled?

Does my child need to bring any supplies for the year?

Where is the outdoor play area?

Do the children have regular access to a gymnasium and equipment?

What services are available to the school? For example, are there health services (speech, dental, immunization)? Social and family support agencies? Recreational and cultural associations?

Appendix 2

Differences between the kindergarten programs offered to French immersion children and Francophone children

In both the Fench immersion and Francophone programs, French is the language of communication and learning. However, the two programs are quite different because they have different goals and serve different clienteles.

French Immersion Kindergarten Program	*Francophone Kindergarten Program*
Goals	*Goals*
• functional fluency in French	• mastery of French **as a first language**
• mastery of English	• mastery of English
• understanding and appreciation of the French culture	• cultural integration and develo-ment of a strong identity and a sense of belonging to the Francophone community
	• presence of French in all aspects of school as well as in community and home life
	• making the school an extension of the Francophone family and community in order to support children and their families in linguistic and cultural growth
Clientele	*Clientele*
• children whose mother tongue is not French, and whose parents have chosen to enroll them in French immersion in regions of Alberta where it is available	• children whose parents have the right to French first language education for their children according to section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
• children who speak English or another language (not French) outside of classroom activities and in the home	

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Feedback

French Immersion Kindergarten : A Handbook For Parents

We would like to know what you think about this handbook. Are you a:

____ Parent

____ Teacher

____ School Administrator

____ District Administrator

____ Other (please specify)

1. I found this handbook:

____ extremely useful

____ useful

____ somewhat useful

____ not very useful

2. What could be done to make this handbook more useful?

_____

_____

3. Other comments and suggestions:

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your feedback.

Please send your response to:

Language Services Branch
Alberta Learning
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5K 0L2
Fax: 780–422–1947

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24